

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00220 01 OF 03 161153Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 INR-10 IO-13 NSC-05
DODE-00 CIAE-00 AID-05 /063 W
-----040903 161227Z /20

P R 161045Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9021
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 VIENTIANE 0220

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID EALR ETRN SOCI PBOR LA TH US (UNDP, WFP)
SUBJECT: DELIVERY AND DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD AID TO LAOS

REF: STATE 037035 NOTAL

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SUMMARY: TRANSPORTING LARGE QUANTITIES OF FOOD AID
INTO LAOS IS COMPLICATED BY THE EXISTENCE OF ONLY TWO
FEASIBLE ENTRY POINTS; THA DEUA (VIENTIANE) AND SAVANNA-
KHET. INTERNAL TRANSPORT SYSTEM, WHICH IS SUBJECT
TO DISRUPTION WITH THE ONSET OF THE MONSOON BY LATE
JUNE. WFP/UNDP OFF NEKLS WHO ARE COORDINATING TRANS-
PORT OF FOOD ASSISTANCE WITH THE LPDR CURRENTLY PLAN TO
SEND THE BULK OF FOOD AID THROUGH SAVANNAKHET, FROM
WHENCE IT IS TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN KHAMMOUANE, SARAVANE,
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AND ATTOPEU, IN ADDITION TO NEEDY AREAS IN SAVANAKHET.
THE VIENTIANE PROVINCE NEED FOR FOOD AID WILL BE LESS
THAN THAT OF SOUTHERN LAOS.
EFFECTIVE MONITORING OF INCOMING FOOD ASSISTANCE IS
MADE VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED WFP/UNDP
STAFF. THE LPDR HAS, HOWEVER, PROMISED TO PERMIT
OBSERVERS TO SPOT CHECK ALL LINKS IN THE DISTRIBUTION

SYSTEM. LPDR AND UN OFFICIALS URGE THAT WHEAT FLOUR NOT BE SENT AS FOOD AID BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED LPDR CAPACITY TO ABSORB THIS KIND OF AID. UNDP AND WFP OFFICIALS ALSO URGE THAT DONATIONS BE ACCOMPANIED BY INSECTICIDE. STORAGE CAPACITY DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE A MAJOR PROBLEM. OPENING OF ADDITIONAL THAI-LAO BORDER POINTS WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY EASE DELIVERY AND DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS.

WE SUGGEST THAT DEPARTMENT BE FRANK IN ITS CONSULTATIONS, BUT WE ALSO THINK THAT IT COULD BE POINTED OUT THAT MOST CHANNELS FOR DIVERSION OF AID NO LONGER EXIST. IN ADDITION, NOT PROVIDING AID WOULD ONLY INCREASE THE FLOW OF REFUGEES REQUIRING FOOD AND RESETTLEMENT ASSISTANCE. END SUMMARY. END CONFIDENTIAL.

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1. THE THREE OVERLAND ENTRY ROUTES FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE ENTERING LAOS ARE 1) THE NONG KHAI-THA DEUA FERRY POINT APPROXIMATELY 23 KILOMETERS FROM VIENTIANE, 2) THE MUKDAHAN-SAVANNAKHET FERRY POINT, AND 3) OVERLAND TRANSPORTATION FROM VIETNAM (PRIMARILY ROUTE 9 WHICH LINKS SAVANNAKHET AND DA NANG). POLITICAL AND LOGISTIC COMPLEXITIES APPEAR TO RULE OUT THE VIETNAM ROUTE FOR U.S. FOOD ASSISTANCE. THERE REMAINS A POSSIBILITY
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THAT AT LEAST TWO OTHER POINTS MIGHT BE OPENED BY THE RTG AND LPDR IN THE NEAR FUTURE, NAMELY 1) NAKHON PHANOM-THAKHEK OR 2) ROUTE 10 CONNECTING UBON AND CHAMPASSAK PROVINCES.

2. IT APPEARS THAT THE NEED FOR FOOD WILL EXCEED SUPPLY IN BOTH NORTHERN LAOS (SERVED BY THA DEUA ENTRY POINT) AND SOUTHERN LAOS (SERVED BY SAVANNAKHET ENTRY POINT). AT PRESENT, 33,000 TONS OF RICE ASSISTANCE IS SCHEDULED TO BE SHIPPED THROUGH THE SAVANNAKHET ENTRY POINT IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. WITHIN THE PERIOD BEFORE THE ONSET OF THE WET SEASON, IT IS LIKELY THAT ADDITIONSL, AS YET UNANNOUNCED BULK FOOD AID SHIPMENTS ALSO WILL BE CHANNLED THROUGH SAVANNAKHET AND VIENTIANE.

3. WFP/UND IS COORDINATING TRANSPORT OF FOOD ASSISTANCE IN COOPERATION WITH THE LPDR. NEITHER THE UNHCR NOR UNICEF IS INVOLVED IN DROUGHT ASSISTANCE TRANSPORT COORDINATION OTHER THAN FOR THE MORE MODEST REQUIREMENTS OF THEIR OWN PROGRAMS.

4. A UNDP OFFICIAL TOLD US THAT APPROXIMATELY 560

METRIC TONS OF FOOD ASSISTANCE COULD ENTER LAOS THROUGH THE NONG KHAI-THA DEUA FERRY POINT DURING THE EIGHT HOURS DURING WHICH THE POINT IS NORMALLY OPEN EACH DAY. UNDP ESTIMATED THAT 200 TONS COULD BE BROUGHT IN BY BARGE AND 360 TONS COULD BE BROUGHT IN BY THE FERRY, WHICH ACCOMMODATES FOUR TEN-TON TRUCKS. THE TRUCKS WOULD REQUIRE 45 MINUTES TURN AROUND TIME.

5. THE UNDP OFFICIAL ALSO TOLD US THAT APPROXIMATELY 600 METRIC TONS OF FOOD COULD ENTER LAOS THROUGH THE MUKDAHAN-SAVANNAKHET FERRY POINT DURING THE EIGHT AND ONE HALF HOURS DURING WHICH THE POINT IS NORMALLY OPEN EACH DAY. UNDP ESTIMATED THAT 600 TONS PER DAY COULD BE BROUGHT IN BY TWO FERRIES OPERATING SIMULTANEOUSLY, CONFIDENTIAL

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EACH OF WHICH WOULD TRANSPORT THREE TEN-TON TRUCKS. THE TRUCKS REQUIRE 45 MINUTES TURN AROUND TIME.

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SP-02 INR-05 IO-06 NSC-05
DODE-00 CIAE-00 AID-05 /044 W
-----041017 161229Z /20 S

P R 161045Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9022
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
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6. THE UNDP OFFICIAL STATED THAT THE IN-TAKE CAPACITY AT EACH POINT WOULD NOT BE AFFECTED SIGNIFICANTLY BY THE LEVEL OF THE MEKONG, WHICH BEGINS TO RISE IN LATE APRIL. ONSET OF THE MONSOON (APPROXIMATELY EARLY MAY IN BOTH SAVANNAKHET AND VIENTIANE) ALSO WOULD NOT AFFECT FLOW OF FOOD AID INTO LAOS BUT WOULD SEVERELY AFFECT INTERNAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE COMMODITIES, PARTICULARLY IN SARAVANE, KHAMMOUANE, AND ATTOPEU, WHERE THE FOOD DEFICIT IS VERY HIGH AND WHERE THE PRIMITIVE ROAD NETWORK BECOMES VIRTUALLY IMPASSABLE FOR LARGE VEHICLES BY THE END OF JUNE.

7. UKDP AND WFP OFFICIALS OUTLINED A SYSTEM OF FOOD DELIVERY FOR SOUTHERN LAOS WHEREBY THEY PLAN TO TRANSPORT FOOD TO WAREHOUSES IN THE CITY OF SAVANNAKHET. THERE THE FOOD AID WOULD BE STORED ONLY LONG ENOUGH FOR IT TO BE TRANSFERRED FROM THE TRUCKS THAT TRANSIT THE

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MEKONG TO TRUCKS DESIGNATED TO DISTRIBUTE THE FOOD WITHIN LAOS. SAVANNAKHET CITY REPORTEDLY HAS A WAREHOUSE STORAGE CAPACITY OF 10,000 TONS, THOUGH THAT SOON WILL BE AUGMENTED TO 15,000 TONS. TOTAL STORAGE CAPACITY FOR THE PROVINCE IS 16,400 TONS, THOUGH CONSIDERABLY MORE SPACE COULD BE CONVERTED TO SERVE AS WAREHOUSING ON A TEMPORARY BASIS.

8. IN SAVANNAKHET, PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES WOULD BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE FOOD STORAGE AND TRANSPORT. UNDP OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN ASSURED THAT THEY WILL BE FREE TO TRAVEL TO ANY POINT IN THE DISTRIBUTION CHAIN TO MONITOR THE OPERATION.

9. THE WFP REPRESENTATIVE TOLD US, HOWEVER, THAT WITH ONLY A HANDFUL OF LOCAL STAFF AND NO INTERNATIONAL STAFF, HE COULD NOT DO MORE THAN SPOT CHECK INCOMING FOOD AID TO GUARANTEE PROPER CHANNELING OF THE ASSISTANCE. UNDP OFFICIALS STRESSED THAT DESPITE THE LPDR PROMISE TO OPEN THEIR DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM TO UNDP INSPECTION, LIMITED SPOT CHECKING WAS THE MOST THAT THE UNDP COULD DO. UNDP/WFP WORKED UP AN ELABORATE INVOLVED SYSTEM THAT SHOULD ASSIST IN MONITORING FOOD DISTRIBUTION AS WELL AS GAS AND OIL CONSUMPTION OF TRANSPORT VEHICLES (FOR WHICH THE UNDP PLANS TO PROVIDE UP TO 50 PERCENT FUNDING).

10. SAVANNAKHET PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL FIFTY TWO-TO FIVE-TON CAPACITY TRUCKS. IN ADDITION THERE ARE THIRTY SIX-TON TRUCKS WHICH ARE PRIVATELY OWNED BUT WHICH COULD BE MOBILIZED FOR FOOD

DISTRIBUTION. THESE TRUCKS WOULD BE USED FOR TRANSPORT
OF FOOD AID TO KHAMMOUANE PROVINCE, WHERE THE FOOD
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WOULD BE OFF-LOADED INTO THE EIGHT GOVERNMENT OWNED
THREE-TON TRUCKS AND SIXTEEN PRIVATELY OWNED SIX-TON
TRUCKS FOR DISTRIBUTION WITHIN THE PROVINCE. KHAMMOUANE
STORAGE CAPACITY IS 16,500 TONS PLUS ADDITIONAL SPACE
THAT COULD BE CONVERTED FOR EMERGENCY USE. KHAMMOUANE
PROVINCE OFFICIALS WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DISTRIBUTION
IN THAT PROVINCE.

11. SAVANNAKHET TRUCKS WOULD ALSO BE ASSIGNED TO DELIVER
FOOD TO SARAVANE AND ATTOPEU PROVINCES. IN SARAVANE
THERE ARE FORTY GOVERNMENT OWNED THREE-TON TRUCKS WHICH
WOULD HANDLE DISTRIBUTION IN THAT PROVINCE. SARAVANE
PROVINCE STORAGE CAPACITY IS 6,000 TONS PLUS ADDITIONAL
SPACE THAT COULD BE CONVERTED FOR EMERGENCY USE. SARAVANE
AND ATTOPEU PROVINCE OFFICIALS WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR
FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN THEIR RESPECTIVE PROVINCES.

12. THE 1977 DROUGHT WAS LESS SEVERE IN VIENTIANE
PROVINCE THAN IN OTHER REGIONS, BUT VIENTIANE IS
TRADITIONALLY A FOOD DEFICIT AREA AND IT WOULD BE
NECESSARY TO CHANNEL SOME FOOD ASSISTANCE TO THIS
PROVINCE. INTERNAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION HERE WOULD BE
LESS AFFECTED BY THE ONSET OF THE MONSOON BECAUSE OF
THE RELATIVELY GOOD ROAD NETWORK IN THE PROVINCE.
VIENTIANE CITY STORAGE CAPACITY FOR FOOD IS 11,000 TONS
WHILE PROVINCE-WIDE STORAGE CAPACITY IS 24,800 TONS,
SUBJECT TO CONSIDERABLE AUGMENTATION BY CONVERSION OF
OTHER SPACE FOR EMERGENCY STORAGE.

13. UNDP OFFICIALS NOTED THAT THE LPDR ASKED THE
SWEDISH GOVERNMENT TO ALTER ITS PLAN TO PROVIDE 5,000
TONS OF WHEAT FLOUR AND PROVIDE INSTEAD 5,000 TONS OF
CORN, TINNED MEAT, OR SOME OTHER FOOD COMMODITY,
EXPLAINING THAT WITHOUT MANY BAKERIES OR NOODLE MILLS
IT COULD ONLY ABSORB A LIMITED AMOUNT OF WHEAT FLOUR.

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14. WFP AND UNDP OFFICIALS TOLD US THAT INASMUCH AS
THE LPDR HAD VIRTUALLY NO STOCK OF INSECTICIDE, FOOD
DONATING COUNTRIES SHOULD CONSIDER PROVIDING INSECTI-
CIDE TO PROTECT DONATIONS DURING THEIR TRANSPORT AND

STORAGE. END UNCLASSIFIED.

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15. THE WFP REPRESENTATIVE NOTED THAT THERE WAS A WFP SPONSORED ORPHANAGE PROJECT IN VIENTIANE PROVINCE, AT KILOMETER 67 ON ROUTE 13 NORTH OF VIENTIANE CITY. THE PROJECT CARES FOR APPROXIMATELY 200 CHILDREN AND HAS ADDITIONAL STAFF AND RESIDENT SITE DEVELOPMENT WORKERS NUMBERING APPROXIMATELY 400. THE FACILITY WAS VISITED BY AN EMBOFF IN JANUARY, WHO FOUND IT WELL MANAGED. THIS ORPHANARE MIGHT BE CONSIDERED AS A SPECIFIC RECIPIENT FOR A PORTION OF ANY U.S. FOOD AID SENT TO THE LPDKR. WE NOTE HOWEVER, (THAT THE ORPHANAGE IS MANAGED BY THE SAME MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR OFFICE WHICH RUNS THE NAM NGUM ISLAND PRISON CENTERS. WHILE THE PROXIMITY TO VIENTIANE OF THE ORPHANAGE WOULD FACILITATE FAIRLY REGULAR MONITORING OF FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT SOME OF ITS AID COULD BE MISCHANNLED.

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SP-02 INR-05 IO-06 NSC-05
DODE-00 CIAE-00 AID-05 /044 W
-----040570 161231Z /20

P R 161045Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9023
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
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16. COMMENT: THE ABOVE INFORMATION IS DRAWN ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FROM DATA PROVIDED BY THE LPDR CENTRAL

GOVERNMENT AND PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES. IF PAST EXPERIENCE IS ANY GUIDE, STORAGE CAPACITY AND TRUCK TRANSPORT CAPABILITY IS PROBABLY OVER-ESTIMATED. MORE-OVER, POOR MAINTENANCE AND POORER ROAD CONDITIONS WOULD PROBABLY KEEP A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF THE LPDR'S TRUCK TRANSPORT DEADLINED AT ANY GIVEN TIME. THUS IT APPEARS THAT ON THE BASIS OF SCANTY INFORMATION, INTERNAL DISTRIBUTION WILL BE A MAJOR PROBLEM IN THE FOOD AID DELIVERY SYSTEM.

17. ESTIMATES FOR IN-TAKE CAPACITY ARE APPARENTLY BASED ON THE UNREALISTIC ASSUMPTION THAT EXISTING FERRY AND BARGE TRANSPORT CAN BE MONOPOLIZED FOR FOOD AID DELIVERY OVER CONSIDERABLE PERIODS OF TIME. IT IS POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, THAT THE FERRY POINTS COULD REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

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OPEN FOR LONGER PERIODS EACH DAY, THEREBY BOOSTING IN-TAKE CAPACITY TO SOMETHING APPROACHING THE FIGURES ESTIMATED BY UNDP. ADDITIONAL FERRY OR BARGE SUPPORT WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE OF MUCH USE BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED OFF-LOADING CAPACITY AT EACH POINT.

18. A THAI EMBOFF HERE HAS NOTED THAT SECURITY WOULD BE THE PRIMARY RTG CONCERN ARISING FROM A DECISION TO OPEN THE NAKHON PHANOM AND ROUTE 10 (UBON) BORDER POINTS. A THAI DECISION TO OPEN THE BORDER AT ONE OR BOTH OF THESE POINTS FOR COMMODITY TRANSPORT ONLY MIGHT ALLEVIATE SOME OF THE THAI SECURITY CONCERNS AND WOULD CERTAINLY BE WELCOMED BY THE LAO AND AID DONORS.

19. ALTHOUGH THE DEPARTMENT IS THE BEST JUDGE OF HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE USE OF THE FOREGOING INFORMATION IN CONSULTATIONS WITH CONGRESS, WE TEND TO BELIEVE THAT THE BEST TACTIC WOULD BE TO BE FRANK. THERE IS NO WAY THAT WE OR ANY INTERNATIONAL AGENCY CAN GUARANTEE 100 PER CENT PROBLEM-FREE DELIVERY OF AID IN LAOS. NEVERTHELESS, IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THAT SOME OF LAOS' BASIC PROBLEMS COULD HAVE A PERVERSE FAVORABLE EFFECT ON THE WAREHOUSING AND ELIVERY ISSUE. WITH THE ATTEMPTED NATIONALIZATION OF THE LAO ECONOMY AND THE SUBSEQUENT FLIGHT OF MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S ENTREPRENEURIAL TALENT, MOST OF THE OUTLETS AND CHANNELS FOR ILLEGAL DIVERSION OF AID NO LONGER EXIST.

20. WE THINK IT MIGHT ALSO BE USEFUL TO STRESS THE FACT THAT EVEN WITH THE POLITICAL AND OTHER RISKS INHERENT IN PROVIDING EMERGENCY AID TO LAOS, THE ALTERNATIVE POSES SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES AS WELL. NOT GIVING AID WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY INCREASE THE FLOW OF

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REFUGEES OUT OF LAOS. THESE REFUGEE LAO WOULD NOT ONLY MAKE
CLAIMS ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR FOOD AID, BUT
WOULD ALSO WANT TO BE RESETTLED, MAY OF THEM IN
THE UNITED STATES. END CONFIDENTIAL.
ROBERTS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOOD ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978VIENTI00220
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780071-0760
Format: TEL
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780244/aaaablkc.tel
Line Count: 397
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 406547d5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 STATE 37035
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3567952
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DELIVERY AND DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD AID TO LAOS
TAGS: EAID, EALR, ETRN, SOCI, PBOR, LA, TH, US, UNDP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/406547d5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014